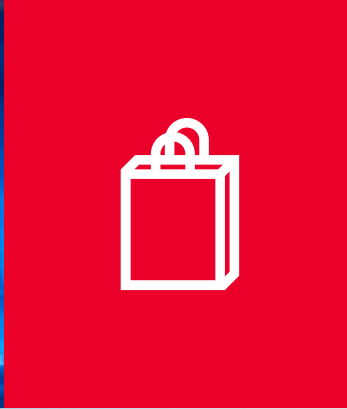


2020-21 EXPLORE MINNESOTA STRATEGIC DIRECTION



EXPLORE **m** MINNESOTA



A woman with a backpack is hiking on a trail through a dense forest. She is looking up at the tall trees. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and branches. The trees are mostly evergreens, with some deciduous trees showing early autumn colors.

Foreword

Minnesota's tourism industry continues to grow and evolve, and so must tourism marketing. As an agency, Explore Minnesota has seen many waves of change over the past two decades. Our growth from a small division within a large department into a separate state agency was largely in response to the state's expanding tourism economy and broadening reach. Today, we are firmly positioned as **a leader in state destination branding and marketing** in the United States.

All aspects of the travel industry have evolved over the years, affected by ever-changing technologies, consumer demands, travel distribution, economic expansion and globalization, to name a few. But there is one constant: **the human desire to travel** in order to connect (or disconnect), explore and discover. As destination marketers, we have responded by honing our storytelling craft to inform and inspire.

As we began this year's strategic planning process, we took the opportunity to really examine our mission as it relates to our promise to both visitors and the Minnesota tourism industry. We engaged with our stakeholder groups through a series of online surveys and face-to-face listening sessions, and also solicited input from the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council and our own staff.

What we heard with a resounding voice from all of these groups is that the primary mission of Explore Minnesota is to **inspire travel to and within our state**. While that objective has been captured and conveyed in our previous strategic plans, we now have refined our focus to just three key areas of concentration: brand awareness, consumer engagement and partner collaboration.

As you will read in this plan, key measures and objectives are presented for each of the three areas of focus. The plan is purposely presented in a simplified manner, not only to allow us to be agile and respond to opportunities and changes in the marketplace, but also to place emphasis on the overall economic indicators of leisure and hospitality sales, taxes and jobs as a measure of our effectiveness.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to elevate the visibility of Minnesota globally. Through destination marketing we can lift the message of travel and tourism, as well as the opportunities uniquely available in our state for economic development, education and cultural exchange. Competition for consumer attention and travel dollars will continue to increase. We support continued growth of our industry by ensuring our resources are concentrated in a way that supports our primary pillars of branding, engagement and collaboration.

Thank you to everyone across the state that has had a part in the development of this plan. Explore Minnesota's 2020-21 Strategic Direction is a reflection of the unified voice of our industry, and allows us to focus on a future of continued **collaboration, growth and community prosperity for all Minnesotans**.



WHO WE ARE

As the state's tourism promotion office, Explore Minnesota pursues an entrepreneurial approach, leveraging the state's tourism investment with increased involvement by the private sector. A council of representatives from the state's tourism industry strongly connects Explore Minnesota with tourism businesses and organizations.

VISION

To elevate Minnesota as a premier travel destination through results-driven, innovative destination marketing.

MISSION

To inspire consumers and facilitate their travel to and within the state of Minnesota.

EQUITY STATEMENT

Explore Minnesota is committed to honoring the value and dignity of all individuals. Through our work, we pledge to foster an environment that respects diversity, inclusion and accessibility, so that all who travel here feel welcome.

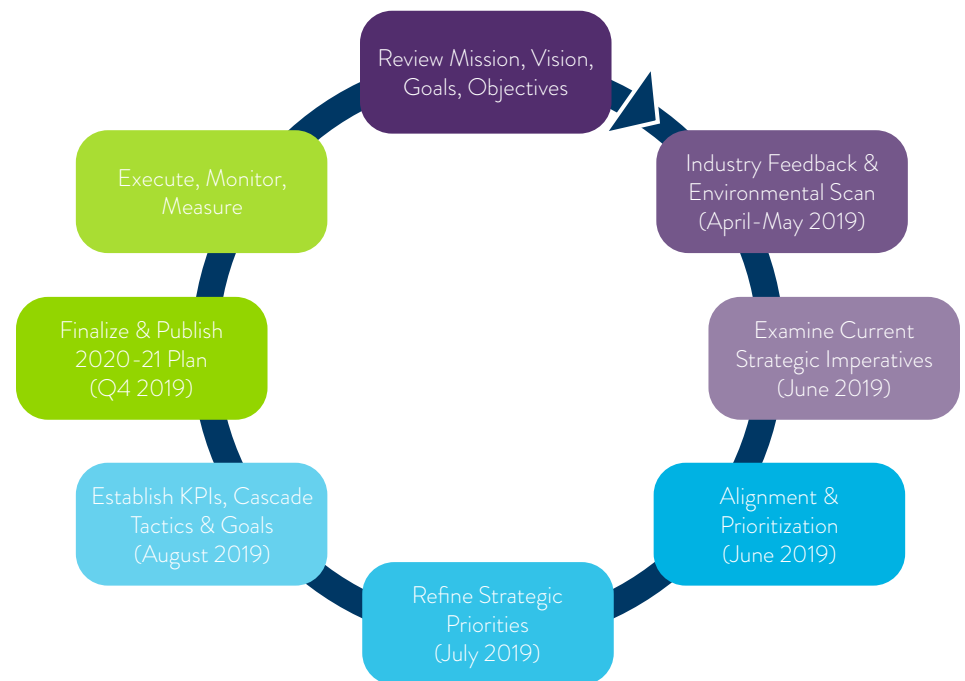
STRATEGIC PLANNING

Process

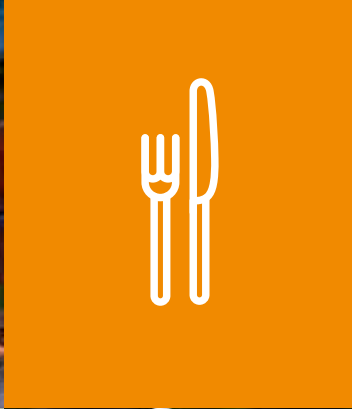


Explore Minnesota surveyed tourism industry stakeholders from around the state, in person at listening sessions, via web conference and through an online survey. Participants included representatives from lodging properties, attractions, convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders with a vested interest in tourism.

In all, close to **500** tourism industry stakeholders participated in the listening sessions and online survey. Next, the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council met to discuss and refine the findings, followed by an Explore Minnesota staff ideation session.



In the end, the following goals and tactics were identified as the top priorities for Explore Minnesota to invest in over the next two years. The strategic plan seeks to reach these annual projections by the end of 2021. Projections will be revisited periodically and updated as needed.



Strategic Direction



#ONLYINMNX



75 MILLION
VISITORS



\$18.1 BILLION
IN SALES



\$1.17 BILLION
IN STATE SALES TAX



281,000
JOBS



- Incremental visitation of **2.2 million** trips from visitors who saw our advertising
- Incremental traveler spending of **\$745 million** from visitors who saw our advertising
- **\$73 million** in incremental state and local taxes collected from visitors who saw our advertising

BRAND AWARENESS



- **5 million** visits to *exploreminnesota.com*
- **4 million** travelers served by travel counselors
- **5 million** engagements on social media
- **3 billion** in estimated audience reach through public relations

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT



- **\$10 million** in match value from public/private partnerships
- **\$2.2 million** in funding to communities through grants and co-op programs

PARTNER COLLABORATION

BRAND Awareness



- Incremental visitation of **2.2 million** trips from visitors who saw our advertising
- Incremental traveler spending of **\$745 million** from visitors who saw our advertising
- **\$73 million** in incremental state and local taxes collected from visitors who saw our advertising



Overwhelmingly, increasing consumers' awareness of Minnesota as a travel destination was identified as Explore Minnesota's primary role. As the state's only official tourism marketing agency, Explore Minnesota should invest in strategic and impactful marketing strategies to reach consumers in key markets, both domestically and abroad.

KEY TACTICS

- **Create inspirational and differentiating marketing to drive engagement:** We will collaborate with agency partners to develop creative messaging that pays off in ways that pique emotion, create impact, separate us from competitors, and drive consumers through the travel planning funnel.
- **Identify niche audiences that will resonate with the unique value that Minnesota can deliver:** By looking at consumers by interests rather than geography, we can extend our marketing footprint beyond the Midwest. We will work with media planners to pinpoint audiences nationwide that index high with tourism products and assets that Minnesota can own. Together we will develop a multi-faceted campaign that hyper-targets consumers in the places where they currently get information on these interests.
- **Integrate content for deeper storytelling among niches and general travel audience:** Content naturally takes people on a journey. We will create content partnerships with subject matter experts to develop first-person stories, in multiple formats, about activities and experiences that make Minnesota special. These stories extend our marketing messages, are easily shareable and spur further exploration.
- **Develop experiential strategies to drive awareness and curiosity about Minnesota as a must-see destination:** Experiential opportunities allow people to sample something about Minnesota in a fun, relaxed and memorable way. There is a broad spectrum of ways these experiences can be delivered. We will work with creative partners to develop ideas that are turnkey, yet impactful, with the audiences they touch.

CONSUMER Engagement



- **5 million** visits to exploreminnesota.com
- **4 million** travelers served by travel counselors
- **5 million** engagements on social media
- **3 billion** in estimated audience reach through public relations



In support of Explore Minnesota's consumer marketing, we are well-positioned to reach prospective visitors in other important ways, including in person, online and through the media. Whether it's a tweet, press release, print publication or a phone call, we are providing consumers with the travel information they are looking for across all of these touchpoints and more.

KEY TACTICS

- **Produce inspiring content that drives action across all platforms:** Website content, photos and videos, social media posts, e-newsletters and print publications are the primary ways we inspire potential visitors. This engaging, timely content is designed to grab consumers' attention and start them on their travel-planning journey. In many cases, this content leads people to, or deeper within, exploreminnesota.com.
- **Provide assistance directly to travelers planning their Minnesota vacations:** Millions of travelers stop by our Welcome Centers, call and email us every year wanting travel information. Even in this digital age, the personalized service that our travel counselors provide can mean the difference between staying the night or simply passing through. Travel counselors serve as a wealth of knowledge for first-time visitors and lifelong residents alike.
- **Engage with social media followers in a meaningful way:** Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube are the primary social media channels where consumers can find and interact with Explore Minnesota. These platforms serve as many people's introduction to our destination, and we are there to answer the questions and help turn their "Likes" into actual trips.
- **Foster relationships with key media to produce positive stories on Minnesota travel:** Explore Minnesota interacts with local, national and international media every day to garner interest in covering Minnesota as an attractive vacation destination. These efforts include proactive pitching, targeted press releases, responding to inbound media inquiries, hosting media familiarization tours, and ongoing communication to grow these relationships for future coverage.

PARTNER Collaboration



- **\$10 million** in match value from public/private partnerships
- **\$2.2 million** in funding to communities through grants and co-op programs



Explore Minnesota is committed to building statewide support for tourism through our leadership role as the official destination marketing organization for the state of Minnesota. We recognize the power in creating meaningful stakeholder collaborations.

By encouraging active participation in our many state-funded programs and initiatives, we are supporting the development and long-term sustainability of Minnesota's tourism industry while ensuring economic prosperity for communities statewide.

KEY TACTICS

- **Identify and develop unique public/private partnerships to maximize marketing dollars and expand reach:** Explore Minnesota partners with high-value brands, private-sector businesses, sports teams, media outlets and statewide organizations to extend the reach of our advertising to new audiences and markets through creative consumer promotions.
- **Create accessible and affordable cooperative programs to assist Minnesota communities and businesses in tourism promotion:**

- We encourage multi-community cooperation and support non-profit community investments with match dollars through annual marketing grants, sports and meetings grants and the new events grant programs.
- We also create and fund a wide variety of cooperative programs, which are available to any tourism businesses, ranging from traditional advertising to new media and technologies, both domestically and internationally.
- **Provide educational opportunities, research and resources to develop and support Minnesota's tourism industry:**
 - We plan to conduct expanded traveler profile and advertising return-on-investment studies, as well as an array of industry-focused and seasonal surveys gauging the sentiment and health of the industry.
 - We will aggregate and disseminate this and other research and data from a wide variety of sources with direct impact on Minnesota's tourism industry.
 - We also plan to debut a new educational platform on our tourism industry website to provide resources for tourism industry professionals at all levels.

ECONOMIC Growth



- **75 million** visitors
- **\$18.1 billion** in sales
- **\$1.17 billion** in state sales tax (18% of total)
- **281,000** jobs (11% of private sector employment)



Achieving the goals laid out in this plan will roll up and directly contribute to the statewide leisure and hospitality figures projected here. The Minnesota Department of Revenue provides economic data annually in two key areas: gross sales and sales tax revenue. The U.S. Bureau of Labor provides employment data.

- **Visitors:** This figure is an estimate of domestic and international travelers on overnight trips or day trips at least 50 miles from home.
- **Sales:** Reflects annual leisure and hospitality industry sales, inclusive of accommodations, food services and drinking places, arts, entertainment and recreation.
- **Sales tax:** Reflects annual state sales tax collected from businesses in the above industry categories. We project this figure will account for 18% of total state sales tax collection.
- **Jobs:** The number of full- and part-time jobs in the above industry categories, which will make up 11% of total private sector employment.

It's important to note that Explore Minnesota is only one of the many players that contribute to these figures. Every accommodation, attraction, visitors bureau, event, and other tourism-related entity in the state plays a role. In addition, national and global trends and policies can affect Minnesota's tourism industry. The projections here are based on historical trends and anticipated growth.

Explore Minnesota seeks to reach these annual projections by the end of 2021. Projections will be revisited periodically and updated as needed.



Explore Minnesota
121 7th Place East, Suite 360
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101, USA

exploreminnesota.com/industry